

REMARKS

Applicant requests favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

The specification has been amended to place the subject application in better form. The informality noted by the Examiner has been corrected. A new abstract has also been presented in accordance with preferred practice. No new matter has been added by these changes.

Claims 1, 3-19 and 21-31 are presented for consideration. Claims 1, 18, 21 and 24-31 are independent. Claims 2 and 20 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. Claims 1, 3, 4, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21 and 23-29 have been amended to clarify features of the invention, while claims 30 and 31 have been added to recite additional features of the invention. Support for these changes and claims can be found in the application, as filed. Therefore, no new matter has been added.

Applicant requests favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the objection and rejections set forth in the above-noted Office Action.

Claims 1-29 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. The Examiner objected to specific recitation in claims 1, 6, 18, 20, 21 and 24-29. To expedite prosecution, Applicant has amended these claims in light of the Examiner's comments. Applicant submits that these changes overcome this rejection. Such favorable indication is requested.

Turning now to the art rejections, claims 1-17, 20, 21 and 26-29 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,451,507 to Suenaga et al. in view of

U.S. Patent No. 6,414,744 to Kuiper et al. Claims 18, 19 and 22-25 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being unpatentable over the foregoing art combination and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,243,377 to Umatate et al. Applicant submits that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach many features of the present invention, as previously recited in claims 1-29. Therefore, these rejections are respectfully traversed. Nevertheless, Applicant submits that independent claims 1, 18, 21 and 24-31, for example, as presented, amplify the distinctions between the present invention and the cited art.

Independent claims 1, 18, 21 and 24-31 recite various aspects of the present invention, such as exposure apparatus for exposing a substrate using a master, a semiconductor device manufacturing method, a semiconductor manufacturing factory and a maintenance method for an exposure apparatus installed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory.

By way of example, the present invention, as recited in independent claims 1, 26 and 27, includes a stage being able to install a master, a first housing for surrounding the stage and a second housing for stocking at least one of the masters. The second housing is allowed to communicate with the first housing, or is inside of the first housing. The first and second housings can be filled with an inert gas or be adapted to be evacuated. By such an arrangement, in the present invention, since an atmospheric substitution is not necessary at a load-lock chamber when, for example, a master is transferred from the second housing to the first housing, masters can be exchanged within a short time period.

Applicant submits that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach or suggest such features of the present invention, as recited in independent claims 1, 18, 21 and 24-31.

The Suenaga et al. patent discloses a stocker for stocking a reticle, a chamber for surrounding a reticle stage space and a load-lock chamber for substituting the atmosphere when the reticle is transferred from the stocker to the reticle stage.

The Kuiper et al. patent discloses purging of a mask library (such as a reticle stocker) with a clean gas.

The Umatate et al. patent discloses an information management system for providing information relating to a plurality of exposure apparatuses connected via a computer network with each other.

Applicant submits, however, that none of the Suenaga et al., Kuiper et al. or Umatate et al. patents teaches or suggests the salient features of Applicant's present invention as recited in the independent claims, such as, for example, the arrangement of the stage and the first and second housings.

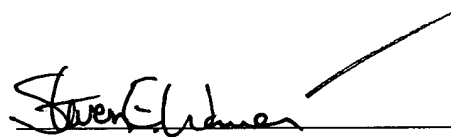
For the foregoing reasons, Applicant submits that the present invention, as recited in independent claims 1, 18, 21 and 24-31, is patentably defined over the cited art, whether that art is taken individually or in combination.

The dependent claims also should be deemed allowable, in their own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in their respective independent claims. Further individual consideration of these dependent claims is requested.

Applicant further submits that the instant application is in condition for allowance.
Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the objection and rejections set forth in the above-noted
Office Action and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by
telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steven E. Warner", is written over a horizontal line.

Attorney for Applicant
Steven E. Warner
Registration No. 33,326

FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, New York 10112-3801
Facsimile: (212) 218-2200

SEW/eab